

Aphasia teaching by the experts: a collaborative approach to undergraduate education

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Background information

DMU4 is a once monthly conversation group for people with aphasia (PWA). The group started in 2008 and is part of Aphasia Leicester, an organisation created and run by PWA. The main purpose of the DMU4 conversation group is to give PWA an opportunity to meet and practise talking. Since October 2009 the group has provided teaching for second year Speech and Language Therapy students. Theoretical teaching about aphasia is provided within academic modules that are delivered alongside the DMU4 learning experience. It is hoped that this will encourage students to link theory to practice. The DMU4 conversation group learning opportunity also responded to clinical teacher feedback that suggested our Speech and Language Therapy students would benefit from more confidence and greater skills in talking to PWA.

Student training

Although DMU4 is not directly modelled on the conversational partner scheme outlined by McVicker, Parr, Pound and Duchan (2007), the conversation group has adapted elements of the CONNECT training programmes to suit undergraduate conversation training. Before the group, students are asked to prepare themselves by reading one of three noteworthy conversation based resources: Kagan & Gailey (1993), Kagan (1998) & Simmons-Mackie (1998). In a lecturer led pre-group tutorial students are asked to discuss these papers and also discuss their perceptions about: their role in the group, how to start a conversation with a PWA, how to synthesise theory with practice and how to design an aphasia friendly feedback sheet.

An example of an aphasia friendly feedback sheet designed by second year students:

On a scale of 1-10 when 1 is not good and 10 is good...

Not good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Good	10
1. Did I listen well?											
2. Did you enjoy talking to me?											
3. Did I help you to talk?											
4. Were you comfortable with me?											
5. Did you understand me?											

After the pre-group tutorial students participate in the two hour conversation group. In the first hour students experience talking to a PWA. After one hour the students receive feedback from their conversational partner using the feedback sheets designed in the pre-group tutorial. After a short coffee break students are paired with a different conversation partner for a second one hour conversation. Students receive feedback from their second conversational partner also. At the end of the group students are asked to complete a teaching evaluation sheet. These sheets are designed to help students reflect on their DMU4 experience. The reflective process is enhanced in a post group tutorial led by a PWA when students talk about their observations and evaluations.

Teaching evaluation 2010/2011

Teaching was evaluated in three ways:

Firstly students were asked to rate the DMU4 experience on a scale of 1-10. From the 26/30 students who gave this type of feedback the average score was 9/10 and the range was from 7-10.

Secondly students were asked to complete a self evaluation feedback worksheet that enabled them to identify examples of supporting conversations and allowed them to evaluate their ability to use these skills:

DMU4 conversation group student feedback worksheet based on the work of McVicker (2007) and Kagan & Gailey (1993)

Where possible provide an example and rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 ...did you?											
1 acknowledge communication: Student example: When PWA drew a picture I interpreted what they were.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2 look, watch and listen: Student example: Kept eye contact and watched for gestures while listening.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3 give adequate processing time: Student example: Allowed PWA to think of answer, sometimes I had to guage whether the person would prefer to change the subject.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4 respond to receptive problems: Student example: When PWA did not understand what I'd said, I repeated myself but phrased it differently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
5 check things out: Student example: Say what you think they are trying to say to confirm it, tell them you don't understand or rephrase and check what you say.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
6 Expand and reflect on messages: Student example: If they were having naming difficulties I would paraphrase it for them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
7 Signal topic intiation and change Student example: Tried to introduce a new topic "so holidays, have you been on holidays this year?" Using the key word.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
8 Use simultaneous multimodal communication: Student example: Wrote and drew pictures to help communication.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
9 Use closed and yes/no questions Student example: Are you married and do you have children?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Finally students were asked to identify three things they had learnt during their DMU4 conversation group experience. Student responses were analysed and grouped into four categories: personal gains, changed beliefs, knowledge and skills.

Personal gains

- Increased confidence
- Feelings of accomplishment – it was not as hard as predicted

Changed beliefs

- PWA don't mind talking about their aphasia
- PWA are ordinary people
- It is alright to say that you don't understand
- Surprised at the memory of a PWA being so good

Knowledge

- PWA can work in groups/organise/plan and have opinions on subjects
- People with aphasia know what they think but don't know how to say it
- Aphasia is frustrating, confusing, upsetting and can make the PWA angry

Skills

- How to have a conversation with a PWA
- How multimodality input really helps some clients express themselves when they have difficulty with spoken output

- How to initiate a conversation with severely aphasic people and quickly get to know how to communicate with them and be on the same level
- Be creative, think of all the possible things the person could could be trying to communicate
- Use a range of everyday topics helps to maintain and encourage flow of conversation

References

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